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Formosans on Saipan

New Book Reveals CIA Spy School

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WASHINGTON — The Central Intelligence Agency, in a summer of embarrassments, today faces another sticky disclosure.

Would you believe the CIA operated a hidden Shangri-la for training thousands of Chinese Nationalist student spies?

A description of the alleged operation, termed "one of the best-kept U.S. military secrets since the end of World War II," is given in a book published Friday.

The place: A suburban residence - training school complex hidden in the jungle of tiny Saipan Island in the mid-Pacific. The time: Beginning in 1953 and continuing at least through 1961.

Book on Earhart.

The details, including an account of a conducted tour of the secret installation, are related in "The Search for Amelia Earhart," by Fred Goerner, who has been seeking for years to solve the mystery of the disappearance of the famous woman flier and her navigator over the Pacific nearly 30 years ago. The publisher is Doubleday of New York.

A spokesman for the CIA said it is the agency's policy "not to comment one way or another" on such matters. The CIA, among other things, has been under congressional fire for unfortunate publicity.

The Defense Department said it would look into Goerner's account.

Goerner, a San Francisco radio commentator, on his second trip in 1961 to Saipan in search of evidence on the fate of the two fliers, unexpectedly was invited to visit the restricted northern end of the island.

Modern Shangri-la

The invitation led him to a modern Shangri-la, U.S.-style, he relates.

"There, in the middle of the jungle on a tiny island 5,000 miles from San Francisco, was a modern town which could shame many better-class U.S. suburbs."

He writes that the town contained more than 100 two and three-bedroom homes, featuring carefully tended lawns. New cars were parked in carports and driveways. Family wash hung on lines behind garages.

Park-like areas separated clusters of buildings. Near the center of town was a library, soda fountain-snack bar, barber shop and theater - auditorium. The surrounding parking lot could have been that of a highway shopping center.

The installation's clubhouse, to which he had been invited, could not have been out of place on Las Vegas' casino strip, the author writes.

"Remove the Pain"

"The club obviously was designed to remove most of the pain from even a prolonged stay on Saipan."

Behind the facade was a grim operation.

"Shangri-la" had been constructed with an initial appropriation of \$30 million beginning in 1953.

Chinese Nationalist troops, Goerner reports, were landed at night, blindfolded, and then driven in curtained buses to the Naval Technical Training Units, the cover name for the operation.

The student soldiers were given a post-graduate course in espionage. Included at the 11 training sites were permanent concrete buildings and barracks.

Goerner estimates that between 6,000 and 7,000 Nationalists were trained there by mid-1961.

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Secrecy Reasons

The secrecy was maintained apparently for two reasons: To avoid annoying both Soviet and Chinese Communists, and to side-step involvement with the U.N., which keeps an eye on military activities within trust territories such as Saipan.

According to Goerner, Saipan and the adjacent island of Tinian were turned over by special order of President Truman on Jan. 1, 1953, to the CIA, though the Navy ostensibly was in control. The islands had been under the Interior Department.

The islands in the Marianas were selected for the operation, Goerner reasons, for their remoteness and that because on Saipan, even though just 12 miles long and 5 miles wide, an installation could be kept secret from the population of 7,500.

Newsman Discouraged

The Defense Department understandably discouraged newsmen as much as possible from visiting Tinian and Saipan. Thus when Goerner finally was allowed to pursue his Earhart investigation, he interpreted the less-than-enthusiastic military cooperation as related to the mystery of the woman flier. The real concern, of course, was the training school. At the time, he writes, Goerner pledged he would not disclose anything about the operation. Apparently the restriction has been lifted.